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UNCLAS ROME 000042

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USDA FOR HEGWOOD  
USDA FOR FAS/OA/CHAMBLISS AND SLUTSKY;  
ITP/SHEIKH AND MACKE; FAA/NE/WILSON;  
DOS/EB/TPP/ATT; EUR/ERA; E-ASHUM; EB-GADSDEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AGRICULTURE MINISTER ORDERS SEED CERTIFICATION AGENCY TO QUANTIFY GMO-FREE SOURCES FOR SOY AND CORN SEED FOR PLANTING.

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¶1. SUMMARY. THE ITALIAN MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE ORDERED THE NATIONAL SEED CERTIFICATION ENTITY (ENSE) TO PROVIDE BY JANUARY 12 ASSESSMENT OF THE AVAILABILITY OF GMO-FREE SOY AND CORN SEEDS FOR PLANTING. TO CONSIDER AN EXPANSION OF THE POTENTIAL SOURCES OF NON-GM SEEDS FOR THE 2002 PLANTING SEASON, THE MINISTER CONTEMPLATES RESCINDING EXISTING MINIMUM STANDARDS ON SEED GERMINATION FOR THESE TWO SEED TYPES. MINISTER ALEMANNO WILL DECLARE A TOLERANCE FOR ADVENTITIOUS PRESENCE OF GM MATERIAL IN SEEDS FOR PLANTING BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF THE ENSE STUDY. END SUMMARY.

¶2. ITALIAN MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE GIOVANNI ALEMANNO ISSUED A DECREE DECEMBER 28, 2001 REQUIRING A SURVEY ON AVAILABILITY OF SOY AND CORN SEED WHICH ARE FREE FROM ADVENTITIOUS PRESENCE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED MATERIAL. THE SEED CERTIFICATION INSTITUTE WHICH WILL CARRY OUT THE SURVEY IS ENTE NAZIONALE SEMENTI ELETTE, ENSE, A TECHNICAL OFFICE FUNDED BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND DIRECTED BY A BOARD APPOINTED BY THE MINISTER. IN THE DEC 28 DECREE ALEMANNO PRESUMED A CONSENSUS AMONG ITALIAN PRODUCERS TO KEEP THE ITALIAN FOOD CHAIN FREE OF GMOS.

¶3. THE DECREE STATES THAT IN ORDER TO CONSIDER SOURCES OF CORN AND SOYBEAN SEEDS

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FOR PLANTING WHICH ARE ABLE TO COMPLY WITH A ZERO TOLERANCE FOR GM MATERIAL, CURRENT MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SEED GERMINATION RATES MAY BE SUSPENDED. IN ORDER TO BE MARKETED IN ITALY SEED CORN IS CURRENTLY REQUIRED TO HAVE A GERMINATION RATE OF AT LEAST 90 PERCENT AND SOYBEAN SEED MUST GERMINATE AT 80 PERCENT.

¶4. DATA ON SEED SALES FOR 2000 SHOW THAT THE UNITED STATES SUPPLIED HALF, BY VALUE, OF ITALY'S CORN SEED IMPORTS. THE UNITED STATES SUPPLIED ABOUT EIGHTY FOUR PERCENT OF ITALY'S IMPORTS OF SOYBEAN SEED FOR PLANTING IN THE SAME YEAR. THE VALUE OF UNITED STATES SALES OF THE TWO TYPES OF SEED WAS APPROXIMATELY DOLS 32 MILLION.

¶5. COMMENT: THIS DECREE IS NOT ONLY UNEXPECTED BUT IT ALSO APPEARS TO CONTRADICT WHAT ALEMANNO TOLD SECRETARY VENEMAN IN NOVEMBER 2001. DURING SECRETARY VENEMAN'S MEETING WITH ALEMANNO HE VOLUNTEERED THAT ZERO TOLERANCE FOR GMOS WAS UNATTAINABLE. WE HAVE SEEN SIGNALS FROM ALEMANNO THAT HE IS BECOMING MORE ANTI-GMO SINCE THAT TIME. THIS POST'S SOUNDING OF THE SKELETAL EPIPHANY WEEK GOI REVEALS NO INDICATION THAT THE DECREE IS ANYTHING BUT AN ALEMANNO MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE. WE ARE DEVELOPING INTERVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS. END COMMENT.

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¶6. SELECTED TEXT OF ALEMANNO DECREE FOLLOWS:  
- A. BY JANUARY 12, 2002, ENSE WILL CARRY OUT A MARKET SURVEY IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE QUANTITIES OF CONVENTIONAL CORN AND SOY SEED WITH ZERO TOLERANCE THRESHOLD FOR GMO PRESENCE AVAILABLE OR ACQUIRABLE FOR THE ITALIAN MARKET FOR THE 2002 PLANTING SEASON,

AND ALSO WITH REFERENCE TO THE QUANTITIES OF SUCH SEEDS MEETING THE PURITY THRESHOLD BUT WITH GERMINATION RATE BELOW THE THRESHOLD DETERMINED BY NATIONAL NORMS IN FORCE.

- B. THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY WILL OBTAIN, BY THE SAME DATE, THE EVALUATIONS OF THE COMPETENT REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR AGRICULTURE.

- C. A FUTURE DECREE, TO BE ISSUED BY JANUARY 16, 2002, WILL DETERMINE THE TOLERANCE THRESHOLDS FOR THE PRESENCE OF GMOS FOR THE 2002 PLANTING SEASON. SEMBLER

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